

Quick Facts

About... Toxic Shock Syndrome

What is toxic shock syndrome?

Toxic shock syndrome (TSS) is a rare, life-threatening infection caused by *Staphylococcus* (staph) bacteria. When these bacteria get inside the body, they can produce a toxin (poison) that can cause very serious illness. TSS is often associated with the use of super-absorbent tampons and sometimes with the use of birth control sponges or diaphragms, so this infection occurs most often in menstruating women. However, men, children, and non-menstruating girls and women can also get TSS if staph bacteria get into the body, e.g., through a contaminated wound.

What are the signs of being sick with TSS?

Some of the symptoms of TSS are:

- a sudden high fever
- rapid drop in blood pressure
- vomiting or diarrhea
- a sunburn-like rash, often on the palms of the hands or soles of the feet
- fainting/feeling weak/dizziness
- muscle aches
- headache, confusion, or seizures
- redness of eyes, mouth, or throat

How is TSS spread?

TSS is not spread person to person. The staph bacteria that cause TSS are commonly found on the skin and in the nose of many people but do not cause illness. TSS can occur when staph bacteria get inside an area of the body where they are not normally found, such as the bloodstream. It is not clearly understood why some people get TSS and others do not.

How is TSS diagnosed?

See your health care provider if you think you may have TSS. Your health care provider may take samples of body fluids, such as blood, for laboratory use to confirm that a staph infection is present. These cultures may take a few days to grow.

How is TSS treated?

With early diagnosis, TSS can be successfully treated with antibiotics. Other medicines are often used to relieve symptoms.

Who is at highest risk for getting TSS?

Those at highest risk for TSS are menstruating women and women using certain birth control devices. Others at increased risk include persons who have undergone nasal surgery and those with bacterial wound infections following surgery.

Can TSS be prevented?

The risk of getting TSS can be reduced by changing tampons frequently, at least every 4-8 hours. It is also advisable to use the lowest absorbency tampon possible and to alternate using tampons and feminine hygiene pads whenever possible. It is possible to get TSS more than once. A female who has had TSS previously should not use tampons or contraceptive devices, such as sponges or diaphragms. Although rare, it is possible for anyone to develop TSS during the course of a staph infection. Therefore, precautions should be taken with wound care such as:

- Clean and bandage skin wounds.
- Change bandages regularly.
- Check wounds for signs of infection. If a wound gets red, swollen, warm or painful, or if a fever develops, call your health care provider right away.

Is there a vaccine that can prevent TSS?

There is no vaccine available to prevent TSS.

For additional information on toxic shock syndrome, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Web site at:

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/toxicshock_t.htm

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